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THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Verse

SONGS, 1915
POEMS, 1916
THE QUEEN OF CHINA AND OTHER POEMS, 1919

Novels

THE OLD INDISPENSABLES, 1919
THE PEOPLE OF THE RUINS, 1920

THE
ISLAND OF YOUTH
AND OTHER POEMS

by

EDWARD SHANKS

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TO
EDWARD MARSH

NOTE

Many of the shorter pieces in this volume have already appeared in Land and Water, *the* London Mercury, *the* New Statesman, *the* Outlook, *the* Owl, *the* Spectator, To-day, *and the* Westminster Gazette. *I am grateful to the Editors of these periodicals, not for permission to reprint, which was not theirs to give, but for having printed my verses in the first place.*

E. S.

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FIRST PART

THE ROCK POOL

To Alice Warrender.

THIS is the sea. In these uneven walls
A wave lies prisoned. Far and far away
Outward to ocean, as the slow tide falls,
Her sisters through the capes that hold the bay
Dancing in lovely liberty recede.
Yet lovely in captivity she lies,
Filled with soft colours, where the waving weed
Moves gently and discloses to our eyes
Blurred shining veins of rock and lucent shells
Under the light-shot water; and here repose
Small quiet fish and dimly glowing bells
Of sleeping sea-anemones that close
Their tender fronds and will not now awake
Till on these rocks the waves returning break.

THE SWIMMERS

THE cove's a shining plate of blue and
green,
With darker belts between
The trough and crest of the lazily rising
swell,
And the great rocks throw purple shadows
down
Where transient sun-sparks wink and burst
and drown,
And the distant glimmering floor of pebble
and shell
Is bright or hidden as the shadow wavers,
And everywhere the restless sun-steeped air
Trembles and quavers,
As though it were
More saturate with light than it could bear.

Now come the swimmers from slow-dripping
caves,
Where the shy fern creeps under the veined roof,

And wading out meet with glad breast the
waves.
One holds aloof,
And climbs alone the reef with shrinking feet
That scarce endure the jaggèd stone's dull
heat,
Till on the edge he poises
And flies towards the water, vanishing
In wreaths of white, with echoing liquid noises,
And swims beneath, a vague, distorted thing.

Now all the other swimmers leave behind
The crystal shallow and the foam-wet shore
And sliding into deeper water find
A living coolness in the lifting flood:
Then through their bodies leaps the sparkling
blood,
So that they feel the faint earth's drought no
more.
There now they float, heads raised above the
green,
White bodies cloudily seen,

Further and further from the brazen rock
On which the hot air shakes, on which the tide
Vainly throws with soundless shock
The cool and lagging wave. Out, out they go,
And now upon a mirrored cloud they ride
Or turning over, with soft strokes and slow,
Slide on like shadows in a tranquil sky.
Behind them, on the tall parched cliff, the dry
And dusty grasses grow
In shallow ledges of the arid stone,
Starving for coolness and the touch of rain.
But, though to earth they must return again,
Here come the soft sea airs to meet them, blown
Over the surface of the outer deep,
Scarce moving, staying, falling, straying, gone,
Light and delightful as the touch of sleep. . . .

One wakes and splashes round,
And magically all the others wake

From their sea-dream, and now with rippling
sound
Their arms the silence break.
And now again the crystal shallows take
The dripping bodies whose cool hour is
done:
They pause upon the beach, they pause and
sigh,
Then vanish in the caverns one by one.

Soon the wet footmarks on the stones are
dry:
The cove sleeps on beneath the unwavering
sun.

MEMORY

IN silence and in darkness memory wakes
Her million sheathèd buds and breaks
That day-long winter when the light and noise
And hard bleak breath of the outward-looking will
Made barren her tender soil, when every voice
Of her million airy birds was muffled or still.

One bud-sheath breaks:
One sudden voice awakes.

What change grew in our hearts seeing one night
That moth-winged ship drifting across the bay,
Her broad sail dimly white
On cloudy waters and hills as vague as they?
Some new thing touched our spirits with distant delight,
Half seen, half noticed, as we loitered down,

Talking in whispers, to the little town,
Down from the narrow hill
—Talking in whispers, for the air so still
Imposed its stillness on our lips and made
A quiet equal with the equal shade
That filled the slanting walk. That phantom now
Slides with slack canvas and unwhispering prow
Through the dark sea that this dark room has made.

Or the night of the closed eyes will turn to day
And all day's colours start out of the gray.
The sun burns on the water. The tall hills
Push up their shady groves into the sky
And fail and cease where the intense light spills
Its parching torrent on the gaunt and dry
Rock of the further mountains, whence the snow
That softened their harsh edges long is gone

And nothing tempers now
The hot flood falling on the barren stone.

O memory, take and keep
All that my eyes, your servants, bring you home—
Those other days beneath the low white dome
Of smooth-spread clouds that creep
As slow and soft as sleep,
When shade grows pale and the cypress stands upright,
Distinct in the cool light,
Rigid and solid as a dark, hewn stone;
And many another night
That melts in darkness on the narrow quays
And changes every colour and every tone
And soothes the waters to a softer ease,
When under constellations coldly bright
The homeward sailors sing their way to bed
On ships that motionless in harbour float.
The circling harbour-lights flash green and red;

And, out beyond, a steady travelling boat
Breaking the swell with slow industrious oars
  At each stroke pours
Pale lighted water from the lifted blade.
Now in the painted houses all around
  Slow darkening windows call
The empty unwatched middle of the night.
The tide's few inches rise without a sound.
On the black promontory's windless head,
The last awake, the fireflies rise and fall
And tangle up their dithering skeins of light.

  O memory, take and keep
All that my eyes, your servants, bring you
    home!
  Thick through the changing year
The unexpected, rich-charged moments come,
  That you twixt wake and sleep
In the lids of the closed eyes shall make appear.

  This is life's certain good,
Though in the end it be not good at all

When the dark end arises
And the stripped, startled spirit must let fall
The amulets that could
Prevail with life's but not death's sad devices.

Then, like a child from whom an older child
Forces its gathered treasures,
Its beads and shells and strings of withered
flowers,
Tokens of recent pleasures,
The soul must lose in eyes weeping and wild
Those prints of vanished hours.

IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

WHEN the lamp's guardian flame was out, he fell
Through dark abysses full of hollow sound,
Through caves of sleep that murmured like a shell,
Till in night's furthest corridors he found,
Past any thought or feeling, his escape,
Where being loses shape,
Where sorrow melts and merges in profound
Blackness, that is not pricked by any light.
There he found rest, how long he could not know,
In the deep middle of unfriendly night,
Safe in his stupor through the to and fro
Of the slow hours which strike and will not spare.
But sorrow's pack soon scented that dark lair,
And as he slept he knew that gradually
Light grew around him, lifting veil by veil
The swathings of his hid security,
Till darkness' self grew pale.

Whither he wandered in that middle land,
Shining and silent, between sleep and waking,
How should he tell? But yet he sees them stand,
Those calm and carven poplars, rising, breaking
Like frozen fountains the still, pearl-pure skies,
Sees, but not hears, the soundless aspen shaking
Over the long and lichened seat of stone
Where he awoke. He lifted heedless eyes
Across the lawns and flower-beds overgrown
Up to the house that crowned the terraces,
And down again, and saw the staring pond,
Lucent and smooth and ringed with irises,
The tall yew-hedge, the orchard trees beyond. . . .
All this, most strange, was strange beyond his care,
For grief attended him,
Moved like a wind soft fingers in his hair

And with her touch his burning eyes made dim.
And now his eyes dropped tears, and did not see
The glowing house, poised on the soft low sky,
The rich warm flowers that nodded silently
Around him, or the birds in bush and tree
That moved as noiseless as the clouds. But soon
Across the hush of that too quiet noon
Something unseen yet drew his misty gaze
To look for what he guessed not. So there came
Softly towards him through the garden ways
A girl in white. Like an unreal flame
A golden pattern played upon her dress,
Which as he stared at her he knew to be
Cast by the tears on his own eyelashes,
Gathering softly and heavily.

Then as again his eyes were dimmed by tears
And with the falling echo of old fears

His heart was filled, he bowed his head and felt
Her sudden soothing hand upon his hair;
And moved by a strange reverence he knelt,
Hiding his hot face in her hollow palms,
And laid upon her lap his vague despair,
Till as a mild wind risen at evening calms
The last black vapours from a tumbled sky,
Her touch serenely rolled away his care
And shed on him her own tranquillity.

A timeless moment thus he stayed and drew
Peace from her hands and from her face unseen
And in that posture greater quiet knew
Than ever yet his heart had found between
The grinding wheels of wakefulness and sleep
Which day or night are full of restless sound,
Laments of giants bound
Or lost birds crying on the lightless deep.
A moment—then the darkness of her hand

Grew thicker round his eyes and held no more
The warm reflected sunshine of that land . . .
Deeper and colder . . . and a shudder tore
His waking body and a thin noise sighed
Through a new darkness dense and terrible
That blackened round him. 'Stay, stay,
stay!' he cried,
Like the harsh notes of a storm-shaken bell.
But thicker all about the shadow fell,
Till with a pang he opened heavy eyes
On the beginning of a pale sunrise,
That flickered chilly on the lamp and bed.
Outside his window the sad aspen shook,
Murmuring loudly, and its tapered head
The poplar sighing bowed. An early rook
In the stiff elm rehearsed the grating cry
Which all the others answered back again.
Burdened by life and by a memory,
He rose to join the usual world of men.

THE GLADE

WE may raise our voices even in this still glade:
Though the colours and shadows and sounds so fleeting seem,
We shall not dispel them. They are not made
Frailly by earth or hands, but immortal in our dream.

We may touch the faint violets with the hands of thought
Or lay the pale core of the wild arum bare;
And for ever in our minds the white wild cherry is caught,
Cloudy against the sky and melting into air.

This which we have seen is eternally ours,
No others shall tread in the glade which now we see;

Their hands shall not touch the frail tranquil
flowers,
Nor their hearts faint in wonder at the wild
white tree.

MORNING ON THE HILL

SOFTLY, softly, the long bare boughs are rubbed together,
A dry leaf spindles down, like a bird's light feather.
Still, oh still—
Silence hath laid, in her woods and on her hill,
The sighing wind asleep,
And thin clouds smoke over, gently creep
Across the bare furrows and rubbed grass and settle down,
Coiling in faint wreaths among the golden stones of the town.

Still, oh still! There is harm in speaking,
Speech is too hard, speech only means waking
Into a world of words where lovely things are bound by names,
Where we pursue colour and call her flowers or flames.

Yet speak if you will, or rather sing
As softly, softly as the bare boughs rubbed
together,
Make no more sound than touch of leaf or
feather,
A song as vague as the mist-wreaths that
cling
Round the woods and the fields and the bare
sides of the down
And the tall ghostly gleaming houses of the
town,
A song that shall mix with silence, a faint
escaping thing. . . .
Then, then we may find in the magic of this
hour
Where it is thought is still, where the brain
has no power
And words have no meaning except their
sound.

SONNET

LIKE someone bolted in a lightless room,
We search and stumble, and our flesh offend
On chairs and tables hidden in the gloom,
And pause, and start again, and in the end,
Legs bruised, hands torn, and minds bewildered, sink
Till, huddling comfortless upon the ground,
We wait for nothing, trembling when we think
How in the darkness dark shapes hem us round.
And some a paper hold, which faintest light
Silted between the shutters lets them see
Dimly, and something written, black on white,
To tell them where the door is and the key.
But even those who see as much as this
Still guess and cannot riddle what it is.

TO THE UNKNOWN VOICE

SPEAK once again, forgotten voice!
How, how gladly would I hear thee
Guide my blind and mortal choice,
Yet long months I come not near thee.
Whither hast thou then removed,
Or did I never hear thee ?
Was that whispering in the mind
Which with sense intent I divined
Only the stir of blood in pulses aching ?
Hast thou never to my ear
Stooped thy sweet mouth, my spirit waking ?
Speak now, if speak thou canst. The hot
blood shaking
Temples and arteries I know,
And in the loud confusion I shall know thee.
Speak and I will hear,
Heart, will and spirit all shall show thee.

Ah, no, no, no!
In the vast echoing cave

Floored by green earth and roofed by empty
sky
Nothing but wind and wave
And no reply
Save vain reverberation of my cry.

Forgotten voice, speak, speak again,
Clearer than winds or waves or men.
Like a lost friend in countries far away,
Thou hast been for so long a day:
Yet rise again, yet speak again to me;
I dwindle, wanting thee!

TO THE UNKNOWN LIGHT

IN the sad spirit
Where all is dark
And fault and merit
Are gray shapes stark,
Each like his neighbour
And each dim,
And pleasure and labour
Alike are grim,
Shine down, O Light
Illumine this night.

Here in the gray
Nor motion nor breath
Nor joy of day
Nor sharpness of death
Relieves the endless
Pitiless gloom
Where goes friendless
Desire to her doom:

Shine down, O Light,
Illumine this night.

I know thou livest,
  Then shine, then shine,
Thou that givest
  Help divine,
Turn on this cold
  Thy burning eyes
Ere starved and old
  The dark heart dies:
Shine down, O Light,
Illumine this night.

THE DANCER

BETWEEN the hither and the further
woods,
On whose dark branches beats the sun in
vain,
Out in the midst where the intense light
broods,
There moves a livelier light, a living fire,
With speed that seems
That still and sleeping radiance to disdain,
And yet no more to tire
Than the quick shapes that haunt our happy
dreams.

Light-skirted, feather-footed, laughing,
dancing,
Borne on a breath of swift and buoyant air,
Turning and sidling, retiring and advancing,
She moves like thistledown, she floats away,
Swings and returns, lifts eyes to take the stare
Of the delighted watchers. Rise and sway

Her skirts about her; and now she slowly moves,
As though an unseen choir of singing Loves
Hovered about her thrown-back head and cried
Delicious praise down to her smiling pride.
And every turn of her young body makes
A silent changing music, fast or slow,
Which as she pauses breaks
And sinks upon itself in shining overthrow.
Silence unbroken follows the silent measure,
The enraptured group that watched her quietly breathes
In the arrested silence of that pause
An air filled full with the sweet scent of pleasure.
Then, as a swordsman slowly sheathes
The blade wherewith he wove a net of light,
So she in ordinary flesh withdraws
The coloured image, volatile and bright,
That danced before them and enchanted them.
Her arms fall softly to her sides,

Soft to the knee falls the skirt's airy hem,
The taut knees bend, the waist relaxes, swift
Down on the grass the unstrung body slides.
She lies there huddled, hidden the flushed face,
Her shoulders heaving up the filmy shift,
One leg outstretched in spent, neglectful grace.

Low mutter they their praise that softly reaches
The panting girl. She does not raise her head
But at the music of their grateful speeches
All her slack body comfortably glows
And in ecstatic weariness she makes
The sun-warmed turf a bed;
Her limbs fall looser, the soft eyelids close,
She sleeps. No voice her languid slumber breaks;
But now the watchers, musing deep and far,
Lift up their eyes

Towards the vague, the sapphirine calm skies,
While, like a visionary moving star,
Still through their thoughts her dancing
image flies.

SECOND PART

Argument

It was foretold by the oracle that Achilles, son of the sea-goddess, Thetis, and of Peleus, King of Thessaly, should have a glorious life but an early and violent death. When the Greek chieftains prepared their expedition against Troy, his mother, hoping to avert this doom, conveyed him to Scyros, where she hid him among the maidens of the island, disguised by her enchantments as one of them. It was also foretold that the Greeks should not take Troy without the help of Achilles, and Ulysses was therefore sent to find him out, which he did by means of a trick. During his concealment on the island Achilles loved Deidamia, the king's daughter, who afterwards bore him a son.

THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

To H. C. Harwood.

HARDLY the first sweet day of sun and showers
On which with dewy lashes the world awakes
And in the pale glass of the stretchèd sky,
Misty with her own tears, sees blurred and dim
Her half-forgotten youth—hardly that day
Had stepped from troubled wave to quiet wave
Before the maidens of the island learnt
They had a new companion. She was tall
And fashioned with a grave and queenly beauty
Wherein the darkness of a grief to come
Shone deep but lustrous, as upon the sand
Of shallow seas on clear and windless days
The shadow of the boat deepens, not flaws,
The watery light. She met them silently,
And when they asked her name she answered, Stranger,

But told not who had brought her there or whence.
All knew a lady had been deep engaged
Through the whole day in secret with the king
And with the rustic lords who counselled him,
But none had seen her come or go. One said
There had been fluting in the morning wind
And stir of waters and a breeze that ran
Against the season's drift at touch of dawn
And strewed in the cool air a tingling music
Like fingers playing on a glass's rim.
One said that in her father's house at noon
She had passed the coolest chamber where the light
Through the rush-woven hangings never came,
And staying her bare feet by the shadowed entry
Had seen pale radiance lying in a pool
Upon the trodden floor, and faintly heard

Her father's voice answering another voice
That uttered, like a wind on ruffling water,
Delicate syllables. And in truth there was
A presence on the island all that day
And all that night. The simple island lords,
Who ruled a land as peaceful as themselves,
Careful to have the granges full of corn,
The goat-skins plump with wine, the flocks and herds
Guarded and tended to a due increase,
Showed in their eyes, like a reflected light,
Serenity, and in their bearing peace,
And in their speech a cadence tranquiller
Than they had used before. Another told
How the next day she had drowsed upon her bed
About the dawn, poised between sleep and waking,
And seen or dreamt (for when full morning came
She knew not which) a rosy shape that drew
Over the ripples to the sea's red verge,

Couched in a rosy shell, with dolphin-teams
And scaly-skinned outriders on the backs
Of great sea-horses, blowing in resonant conches
A deep-breath'd tune, like noise of boisterous waves
Which in full sunshine on a rocky coast
Prolong their turmoil when the storm is done
And seem in play to mock their late assault.
While from her window these she watched, she heard
A crying from wild ocean rise in answer
And saw the rosy shell fade in the dawn
That flowered upon the sea. Or did a cloud,
The sun's first messenger, dipped in his colours,
Melt in his fiery breathing as he rose?
And was that clamour only the first wind
That moves at dawn and from the light-thrilled air
Draws a faint melody? She did not know,
For while she watched with elbows on the sill

Sleep soothed her eyes again. She woke to find
Sky, sea and light and air and nothing more,
Save in her thoughts a half-forgotten dream.

The island Scyros floated on the sea
And in the water shone her crags and towers,
A second self existing in the wave,
Mysterious and lovely, like the double
Which, as some yet believe for comfort's sake,
Attends each man from birth to death, remaining
What in a kinder world he might have been.
But few in Scyros were the flaws and scars
Which the transmuting mirror-sea might smooth,
And in that summer Thetis' blessing lay
Especially upon her. Fishermen
Thanked the sea-goddess for continual calm
That lulled their storm-washed vessels near the rocks

And herded in their nets the plenteous fish.
The farmers watched their fields grow day by day
More fruitful, and the vines under the sun
More prosperously ripen to the vintage,
Unvexed by creeping rot or summer tempest.
Nor wolf nor murrain did the shepherd plague
And on his thyme-grown hills he slept at night,
Close by the dew-pond's green and glimmering round,
While all about him slept the peaceful flock
Like white stones under the distant, kindly stars.
But not alone did the tame things increase
For man's provision. In the dells and brakes
The vines that bear the wild tart fruit grew heavy
Early in summer, and along the ground
Trailed with their load, not waving free in air.
And for the maidens there were many flowers,

Wild orchids rising in the broad-leafed grass
And pale wood-lilies lighting all the hills
And bells, as plenty as the ocean's fish,
That seemed to run in shoals before the wind.
These were the island's wealth and luxury
Wherewith gay summer filled her spreaded skirts.

A constant weather shed bright influence
Upon the life of man, and day by day
The sea-wind blew unswerving, fresh and mild,
And on his airy billows bore the clouds
That sometimes melted in a fruitful shower.
But never was the earth with moisture soaked
To rot the full-eared corn in ripening month,
Nor ever were the maidens from their tasks
In field or garden or on tawny beach,
Or from the games that followed the light task,

By storms untimely or long rains withheld.
There is in maidenhood a subtle strength
Reserved, as if a rift in mountains tall
Should catch the waters of a hasty spring
And hold them peaceful in her lap of stone
One moment, while the sky and leaning flowers
Are mirrored in the floods and make them lovely,
Before they hurry down the side again,
To grow, and take the soilure of their course,
Doing the work of water on the earth.
These that the island nourished needed not
A goddess' blessing on the year to make them
More beautiful, to round the child's thin limbs,
To ripen the lean side, and the slant breast
Curve out in fullness. They were nature's foison,
The flower on mankind's tree, as brief as fair,

The foam-wreath on the restless tide of life,
Whose bubbles rise and break and rise again,
As fugitive and as eternal they.
And who beheld them, youth or graybeard worn
Or child or nursing-mother, felt in them
The magic moment when the race of man
Poises in gathered strength before fulfilment
And turns to beauty. Not least lovely there,
The Stranger, tall of limb and bright of eye
And proud of carriage, joined them in their tasks,
Willing, and meek in answer when she earned
Reproaches of the quicker-handed girls,
And friendly in her looks, though on her brow
Cloudlike a constant sadness weighed, as if
Knowledge mixed there with wonder. In their games
She was the better player. When they ran
With skirts trussed up she outran them easily,
And she was quicker with the tossing ball.

Even their youthful leader she outstripped,
Deidamia, daughter of the king,
Their fellow, though the daughter of the king,
And only by her beauty and her wit
The chief among them, who, till this the first
In race and game, was by the Stranger's mien
Of gentleness and friendliness so pleased
That earliest among them sprang her joy
To greet the new companion and to guide
Her steps unpractised in their well-known paths.
But after they had played one hour away
Suddenly fear possessed them, and they shrank
From touching her or being touched by her,
Compelled by what strange chastity they knew not,
So that a soberness upon them fell
And hushed their laughter, and their lifted arms
Bound to their sides and darkened their bright eyes.

It was as though a wandering god had plunged
Deep fathoms from his castle in the sky
Into earth's thicker air and flying slow
Had paused on shining-feathered vans to watch
So lovely a gathered garland of mortal flowers,
Which—as the shadow of the hawk afield
Frightens the birds to silence—so these maids
Stilled in their merriment and turned to marble.
The game was stayed. The lightly bouncing ball
Bounced into rest upon the sunny ground
And lay there motionless. The ring of girls
Stared each at other, dumbly asking whence
The influence came that thus affrighted them;
And none gave answer. Only in mockery
Echo among the hills drew slowly away,
Breathing soft repetitions of the laughter
That long had ceased. A heavy silence lay
Upon the plat of grass that late with sound
Bubbled and overflowed. Then one by one,
Each loosed her still and rigid attitude;

One bent her waist, and one the attentive
head
Lowered, and one the stiffly pointing arm
Let flex again. But still the silence brooded
Over them all, as though they had been in
truth
But rooted flowers, which have no other voice
Save what the winds and ever-voyaging bees
Create among their leaves. Thus from the
depths
Of sense unconscious rose an airy thought
To warn them of a peril not yet seen
And nameless. But the Stranger gazed
around
The troubled faces, hers grown darker still,
And raised her arms, as if imploring pity,
And slowly let them fall again. She saw,
One after one, the shadowed glances turn
And rest on her in mute distrust. Then she
Breathed deep a sigh of melody forlorn,
As sigh the woods when over darkening hills
Come the first streamers of a storm foreknown,

And to the nearest, grown within that hour
Her friend, who but that moment played with her
And with her made one moving form of grace,
Addressed her sole appeal, silent and wan,
Already hopeless. Deidamia gazed
Down on the grass with veiled, unanswering look,
As though the life and friendliness that played
But lately on her lips and in her eyes
Like a wild wood-thing to some secret hole
At sound of footsteps in the wood were gone.
Not to the rest the Stranger raised her eyes
But staring downward hid the unusual tears
And with a strangled gesture of her hands
Turned quick away. They saw her form recede
Among the olives, up the terraced hill,
The white skirt fluttering from step to step,
Climbing the zigzag path. Then, all confused,
Again they essayed the interrupted game,

Took up the idle ball and listlessly
Threw it from hand to hand. But as they played
The unknown influence that frightened them
Surged newly bodied from the troubled depths
Of maiden sense and trammelled their quick wrists
And hooded their clear eyes and in their thoughts
Dazzled like summer lightning faint and soft
That ripens the green corn on starry nights.

Meanwhile on furthest mountain out of sight
The young Achilles, stripped of maiden's dress,
Ran like a flame. Ant, spider, lizard, snake
Paused in their busyness among the rocks
To see him go. Along the narrow path,
Seldom by any trodden, overgrown
With spiky bramble and the stinging nettle
And binding trails of many a creeping flower,

He leapt unheeding and his naked limbs
Were coursed by rivulets of sweat and blood.
His teeth firm clenched, his nostrils open wide,
His eyes delighted by the wind he made,
He ran and ran untiring. Far below
The tiny people shrank to insect mould,
The sheltered harbour dwindled to a toy,
And soon the highest terraces of vines
Were left behind, and among burning crags
As naked as himself in joy he ran,
Till on the topmost rock where the last pine,
Scorched by the summer, by the winter gales
At every gust unsettled, grimly clings
To bare and dismal life, he paused and fell
Headlong upon the stone and felt its roughness
Pleasantly hot against his heated flesh.
Then he knew nothing but content. His blood,
That swept in race through every stretching vein,
Drowned the wild murmur of the lonely heart

With thunderous echoes in his bursting ears,
And the tired muscles of his youthful limbs
Ached keener as he lay than did the thoughts
That late perplexed his spirit. Soon, too
soon,
The gasping breath grew calmer and the blood
Ran not so hastily. Thus on a night,
When loud gales shake the mountains and
their shouts
Ring on in tumult through the echoing arches
Of bursting heaven, no voice but theirs is
heard;
But when they cease, when gradually the
sky
Appeases her tempestuous children, then
Out of the spreading silence comes a voice
To take possession of the empty air,
The still complaining brook, from shelf to
shelf
Falling in thin-toned misery which seems
To fill the listening world as not the storm.
Achilles wept. The sudden smarting tears

That sprang into his eyes astonished him;
And there, alone or watched by humble things
In whose pure spirits reason was not quick
To mock at grief, he let them fall unstopped
And eased his suffering. But when he looked
Down through the mist of olive-leaves and boughs
That clothed the mountain-side, the sea shone soft,
A smoky blue, whereon the sun's light glinted
And waves broke idly round a pointed reef.
Then on his knees he raised himself and stretched
Strong arms to the kind ocean, crying aloud,
'Mother, arise! Sweet mother, from the sea,
Where with thy flowers the swell is garlanded,
Arise and comfort me! Why was I born
To suffer thus in exile? Must I dwell
Far from my home among a foreign race
And exiled from myself in these false robes,
Kept from the emulations of my youth,
Its triumphs, sports and dangers, like a girl?

Truly the oracle has injured me,
Not only now in seeing my young death,
But first when it ordained that Peleus' son
Should have immortal substance in his flesh:
For who but one that hath unearthly power
Could make that possible which should not be
Or deceive any by so gross a trick?
Who but a goddess, moved by immortal wishes,
Could so mistake the human blood that runs
About my body, and my mortal wish
Thus by divine unpitying logic thwart?'
Thus, thus he cried; and still no answer came,
And still his bosom rose rebelliously,
And still with angry glances gazed he out
Upon his mother's barren, lovely realm,
His mouth awry, his cheeks, 'twixt rage and yearning,
Fiery or wet. At last behind his back
The sun dipped underneath a neighbour peak

And suddenly the air was still and cool.
Below him far, a bird on bough unseen
Raised a night anthem in sweet jets of sound,
And further still, beyond the edge of foam,
A little boat, as little as a leaf,
Rocked on the falling swell, and from the bow
A kneeling fisherman dipped in the wave
His knotted line and watched, with back intent,
While his companion with slow-moving oar
Kept equal head against the gentle tide.

Thereafter, mild and grave and unaroused,
In female robes again the Stranger went
Among the maidens with averted head
And did her tasks with them but not resumed
The sweet companionship of race and game.
And long long day added to long long day
In summer's fragrant count. But all that year

The young in Scyros, like the trodden grass,
Which, when the heel is lifted, lifts again
A green untamèd head towards the sun,
Seeing thus by plenty life's oppressive heel
Raised for a season, raised themselves in joy
And stretched out greedy hands to pick the flower
That might not blow again. But so it was
That when the pot of pleasure came to boil
Youth turned to maid and with persuasive lips
Demanded what she gave not. She, aloof,
Passed by his prayer as though she heard it not,
And held in thought another, dimmer goal
Than such embraces as in earlier day
Herself and him begot. For each to each,
Working in pairs or resting through noon's heat
Or waking double-bedded on airless nights,
The maidens owned, stumbling and wanting words,

How each was haunted by a misty shade,
Real but featureless. And, this confessed,
Each from her sister turned, repenting it,
To hide the blush that showed but chastity
And yet seemed full of shame. And each alone
Considered what her sister said, and dreamed
That better she could see, although not say,
The vision far removed. But in their dances
Ringed on the green and in their skipping
games
A spirit ghosted them as not before
And turned them from the joys of human
maids
To bodiless imaginings. They grew
All through that summer like a race apart,
Yet not the less fulfilled of grace and joy
Which unknown longing lit to deeper hue,
Like lightning playing in a distant cloud
Whose edges still are bright with sunset's
rose.
No more by garden, hill or lonely shore
Deidamia led a romping train

To do their daily tasks or play or swim;
No more on island feast and holiday
She loosed them laughing in the happy crowd
To find new partners who their supple forms
In game or dance with rougher grip might hold
Yet not in arms less loving. When the ship
Out of the uncharmed world beyond the rim
Of visible ocean glided smoothly in,
Unlooked for but most welcome, and the people
Came down rejoicing to the waterside
And ringed about the unknown voyagers,
The maids, withdrawn behind the shouting folk,
Like clouds indeed, ranked in the upper sky,
That in their bosoms hold the needed rain,
Aloof and lovely, wandered out of reach,
And like a summer cloud their shadow threw,
Cool but not dark upon the lively earth.

But soon to them, mustered beyond the throng,
Half hidden in the melting airs of day
That deepened towards night on land and sea,
There came a voice, a strange appealing voice,
That moved them inwardly they knew not how,
And with the rustle and sheen of spreaded stuffs
Thrown on the grass, and many a gem displayed,
Drew them to sidle through the crowd and view
The vessel's cargo. Long and long they gazed,
Charmed by the tongue that wove an airy web
About their spirits; and the Stranger too,
Drawn in among them, gazed with empty eyes
On robes and scarves, till on the growing pile
With careless hand and half-averted look

The merchant threw a sword. An ancient sword
Sank in a bed of softly yielding silks
And lay there darkly gleaming. On the blade
Old grooves left keen and sharp the shearing edge:
The hilt, by many a hand-grip worn and smooth,
Spoke the embrace of battling fingers clenched
Often in noble rage or the desperate
Frenzy of beaten men who dreaded death
Or the cold iron will of slayers set
Upon their fellows' end. These, like a swarm
Of ghosts that from the enchanter's eery glass
The unwary words call forth, rose from the blade
And steamed into the Stranger's smarting eyes,
So that her own stretched hand she could not see
Which the hilt drew towards it. But her flesh

Felt that compulsion in the tendons fine
And in her veins again the blood at war,
Desire with resolution, vow with wish,
Storming between the unused banks. And then,
Unwilling and regretted, the gesture made
Its own completion and an act was born,
Not ever from the world to be effaced
With all its consequence of deed and thought.
The hand that quickly from the hilt recoiled
Could never be the same again, the nerves
That henceforth should its fearful power direct
Were in their deep mysterious root transformed.
Nothing she cared who watched. Herself she saw
In her own spirit something rise and bud,
Suddenly swelling, and the sheath of dreams
Break into curling up and withered leaves
To let that strange flower of the future through,
A blossom which with petals sombrely red

Presaged wild deeds, fruition of desire,
And after fruiting done a something else
Dark to foresee but heavy with a sense
Of weariness and blame and shame and tears.
This gloomed in her wide eyes and hid the scene,
Hid her companions, unawakened still,
Busy in dream with toy and ornament,
And hid the sideways glance that fixed on her
In triumph. Hardly, when that voice began
Low in her ear, like mutter of a stream
Heard by the night-bewildered wanderer
Deep in a misty wood, who knows the marsh
Deadly to straying feet—hardly she knew
Whence that doom-heavy soft persuasion came,
From lips without or the unsuspected thought
New-wakened in her heart with serpent-tongue,
Calling the virgin spirit out of childhood
To life and death and more than life or death.

Dumbly she listened, but as one who looks,
Not listens, with taut sense and straining
eyes,
Then with a muttered word, 'To-morrow!'
turned
Towards the mountain, where the tumbled
crags
And huge still woods seemed in the darkening
air
To spread their darker selves and stain the sky
With deeper hue about them. As she turned,
She saw with outward sight, that nothing sees,
Another glance beseeching her. It passed
As fades the bird's quick shadow on the field
When a cloud overtakes it. Through the
people
With stumbling feet and distant gaze she
went.

This day was summer's harshest on the isle:
Her breath lay heavy in the stubble field

And field unreaped where stood the toppling ears
And every vineyard where the clusters gloomed,
Full-globèd shadows in the still-hung leaves;
And every stone upon the shore rayed back
Dull months-collected heat in stirless air
Among the maidens. They about the show
Still packed with swelling whispers and quick hands,
And felt slow moisture down their bodies run,
Stand on their foreheads and make lank their curls,
Till one raised up her eyes, and on her cheek
A faint breath smote with cold, awakening touch.
Low her voice sounded in the hubbub soft
And yet so deep that each her whispering ceased
And looked, and saw upon the sea's far edge
The sunset like a wavering curtain hung

To hide the unknown. Soft rose, smoky and soft,
Spread out across the sky a melting scroll
And underneath, a cloud, loose-edged and dim,
Rode on the water. Thence the wind blew chill,
Fingered their faces, pushed their tresses back
And laid the airy garments cold and close
Against their shivering and reluctant flesh.
Away from them, alone, the Stranger paused
High on the shoulder of the stony hill,
And looking eastward as they west, beheld
At vision's limit, poised in crystal air,
The phantom of a mountain-range, whose base
Sprang out of vapour, but whose floating peaks
Threw back in broken gold the sun's last light.
Dazzled she stood and stared. The mountains swam

Like rainbowed ice afloat on Arctic seas,
Inpalpable, but sharp of edge and colour,
One moment, and the next dissolved in shade,
Gone like a glowing cloud that winds disperse;
And darkness from that first drowned point came on,
Hurrying on to cover all the world.

Again Achilles laid upon the rock
His maiden garments, now with sad contempt
Yet something new of sorrow in the touch
That needlessly made smooth their tumbled folds.
Then, like the rising of the winter sun,
Burning but sullen-hued, out of pale clouds,
The hero's body rose, from that eclipse
For ever freed. Now up the deep ravines
That clove the mountain, and the hollow paths

That scaled her flanks, flowed darkness like a tide
And the long grass streamed out invisibly
Like seaweed under the slow-swelling wave.
Far from the fitful lights and voices loud
Achilles came with heavy, lagging step
Up the ascent. His feet the pollen brushed
From pale, night-waking flowers and murmured on
Through weeds by summer's heat made harsh and dry,
As though earth's spirit in the stillness breathed
A nervous deep unrest. Heavy he trod
And paused at every turning of the path
And took the next step upward with a sigh.
And often as he went he looked behind
As though in quivering bough and air-tossed leaf
Were whispers of an unknown follower.
But closer still thought's dark pursuers came,
Spirits new waking and agog to form

Themselves strong bodies from the smoking
blood
His hand was now to spill, and from his own
That after must be spilt. At last he stayed
Under an olive-tree and sinking down
Bowed his hot forehead into crampèd hands,
Feeling a little world whose pulses beat
Like earthquakes or annihilating wars.
About his seat the creatures of the night
Sought each a weaker, and the ancient rocks
Saw many a scene of tiny battle and death.
After an hour was gone he raised his head,
Hearing, he thought, once more below the
crag
The quiet water washing on a reef
Which in the silence grew, until it seemed,
Close in his ear, but in no human tongue,
A gentle voice speaking strange words of
peace.
'Mother,' he cried, 'it is your voice. O use
The speech I know!' No answer came to
him:

But when the echoes of his cry had fallen
Like stricken birds from dark crag to dark sea,
He spoke again: 'Mother, was it from this
You hid me, not my own longings, my own dreams?
These were the deeds I dreamt of—to make cause
With the shrill cuckold for the magic harlot
And slay innocent men! Now I can see
What it is that must die before my death,
Eaten at the root before the arrow strikes.
I cry to you as not before, for then
I accused the kind, unknowing deity
That saw the motions of my human heart
As I have watched the toad's dull pulsing throat
In ignorance and love. Now I implore
Your strength against the thing you feared for me!
For this dark fate that points out the forked way

Loves not nor hates, but knows, and in my brain
Has sown a dreadful guessing. Shall I become
An airy bubble, empty, round and gay,
That leaves not even a stain upon the earth,
Or the gross meat which day by day my fellows
Pass through dishonouring stomachs for their food ?
How should I choose between them if I must ?
Yet as I speak my choice is made.' The sea,
Moaning about the eternal base below,
Spread through the air a voice of sad assent
That gripped his heart and in the grip gave peace,
The peace of things resolved, not to be changed.

Deep grew the darkness where he stood. The moon,
Arising softly from a couch of cloud,
Lightened the hillside here and there, and cast

On every shadowed place a thicker shade.
Within that veil Achilles stood obscured,
Numb at the heart, but all Achilles now,
For now from him a last enchantment fell,
Leaving him strong and sad. Out of the world
Faded at last the semblance he had borne,
Vanished as vanishes a happy dream
Which at the menace of inbreaking day
Still shields the sleeper from the cruel sun.
Gone was the Stranger. Whither? Ask as well
Where the flower's beauty goes when petals fade
And the rough seed thrusts out. Yet it may be
That still a spirit haunts the isle, a ghost
Of dew and light and air, revisiting
The beach where long ago the maidens played,
And finds perhaps in some far, narrow vale
The rude grave of a poet, dead too young,
Whom death, or life, frustrated of his hope,
Presses her faint lips to the soil and breathes

One word of half-remembered sisterhood.
But these are dreams. Out of the breathing world
Long, long ago that semblance fled away,
Past any summons, even of the sweetest mouth
To which it once had answered. Now in vain
Those patient feet climbed the rough path, in vain
Deidamia through the olive-trees,
A slip of white that dimly drifted on
Like sunshine pale in sea-abysms drowned,
Searched groping and astray. In vain she called,
Bidding the lost companion answer her—
Too late the summons spoken to a wraith.
Yet a receding whisper trembled out
As though the air had spoken or the leaves
Had lent a voice to the unbodied spirit
To breathe an inarticulate farewell.
Gladly she answered and again came on
And by the darkness where the hero stood,

Only a shadow paler than the rest,
Troubled that shadow with her gentle plea:
'Why do you shun us, Stranger? Have we not
Long since repented, though in looks not words,
The wrong we did you? We were cruel and strange,
Knowing not why, not knowing we were so,
But moved by something hidden in ourselves
That never stirred before. It was not unkindness
Turned me from you and soured my friendly heart
But kindness too sudden in my breast. O say,
What serpent raised its head 'twixt you and me
And stung the hands held out in growing love?'
She paused, and in her voice the tears welled high
Like an encroaching wave that fails again
Before the brink. 'Why are you strange to us?
What wakes in us a thing so long unknown

To sudden aching life? Before you came
We lived together, maidens without thought,
As though the rolling world its axle stayed
And time forebore to trouble us. But now
The emblems of our dream grow real and harsh,
Our peace becomes a smarting restlessness.
Return to us, return, and we with games
And gentle love will woo you to ourselves
And all shall be with us as once it was.
Will you not come with me? Can you not give
Again what I at first refused?' He stood
As rigid as a cypress-tree at noon
When all the mountain sleeps and on her side
The woods are breathless. Then with painful cry
At one step from the thicket he advanced
And in the moonlight tall and naked appeared,
Saying with harsh, loud voice, 'I am Achilles!'

Whereat the girl moaned low, shrinking
aside,
And all life's terror flickered in her gaze.
He bent his straining body down to her,
She winced away still more on powerless
knees,
And thus they stayed unmoving. The night
stilled
Her wandering airs and every jigging leaf
Hung quiet on the stalk. Nothing was heard,
Save from the girl a deep and labouring breath
That broke into a sob and died away
And left a quivering horror in the darkness
When silence rose about the frozen pair.
Until at last Achilles spoke again,
Like thunder speaking on the cloudy hill
To dwellers in the valley far below,
Distant, deliberate and dreadful. 'You
Shrink now from truth as once from lies. I
have looked
Truth in the face and seen a fearful thing,
Not what we think—yet I am not afraid.'

He ceased. Again the echo died. The girl
Raised her sunk face with wrung and questioning look,
As though upon his breast was written a word,
Where the hard answer to all questions lay,
Which she spelt slowly out. Upon her brow
The weight of unexpected knowledge grew,
As harsh a weight to carry as may be
In mortal womb the progeny of a god.
Yet never did the proud and stem-straight neck
Sway at the burden; and in those wide eyes
Horror gave way to wonder, wonder drew in
A sharp and dolorous ecstasy. At last
He, bending down, another answer read
To his own cry. There was in their embrace
No kindness nor no pleasure, but the strength
Of floods unloosened, as their spirits rose
Dizzy and blind through the void fields of night.

O stars, shine kindly on them, and, dark earth,
Breathe all your thick and friendly odours up
About their bed, the smell of well-dunged fields
Ready to bear new harvests and the smell
Of cattle stalled in comfortable byres,
Mixed with the keener scents of transient flowers,
That drift, a natural incense, on the hills;
And you, dim forest on the mountain side,
Receive among the noises of the night
That cry of bodily pain and let it fall
Into the silence with the fox's bark
And scarce-heard whimper of the netted hare.

When the slow morning came, the crawling sun
Appeared behind a heavy bank of cloud
And threw a gray and level flood of light

Towards the island; and the hero's arm
Threw a distincter shadow on the breast
That panted soft beneath it into peace.
He raised himself a little, and with voice
That dawn's mysterious hush made thin and still
Murmured, 'The night is over, I must go!'
Then with convulsive grasp of his strong arms
He raised her to him, and his anxious mouth
Sought on her quiet lips, cold cheeks, dark lids,
A further tenderness night had not shown.
He found not what he sought, or, if he found,
Found also in that sweet such bitter taste
As checked the crowding kisses. Through his tears
That ached unshed he saw her resting body
Blurred with unsteady light. He closed his eyes
And in his heart wild lamentation rose,
A jarred and dissonant music that bewailed

Their two defeated lives. O for the world
Of dreams and unawaked enchantment still!
Already on her smooth brow and lineless
cheeks,
Forewritten in a ghostly character,
Age, sorrow and deception and the shame
Of hopes forsaken grinned at him. He knew,
His loth flesh crawling at the touch, that now
The hateful pencil wrote upon his skin
Its mocking message—not the same, for age
Had no part in it. This was truth indeed,
Which he had seen, he boasted, without fear,
But dim and veiled, not in particular shape.
He winced unbearably, his spirit felt,
Grinding and harsh, the stirring of that truth,
Too like the pangs of motherhood which soon
Deidamia's body must convulse,
Being to her then, deserted and alone,
The sole remembrance of this night, their
love.
He groaned, but at the sound she raised, her
eyes,

Answering him only with a long, slow look
Deep in his own, which gazed at her and shed
Their burning hunger and unrest, until
They mirrored pure the mournful peace of hers,
The peace of things fulfilled, deep beyond joy.

May Day, Portofino
—Christmas Day, Lewes, 1920.

THIRD PART

THE SKY AT CAMPDEN

To Eleanor and Alec Miller.

FOLD after fold, the smoky clouds come over
The western edge,
Sag, lift and sink and at last discover
A long thin strip of delicate blue sky.
Sharp drawn against it, the thin hedge
Upon the hill-top and the high
Unstirring groves of trees
First catch the sun as the clouds go over,
Sailing eastward to uncover
The airy width of blue.
And all the fields above and here all these
Shine green and golden, slowly fade
And in the shadow lose their burning hue,
Where grass and leaf and corn one hue are made,
And faintly, gradually glow again
As the sun takes them
Or shudder, veiled in the darkly gleaming rain,
Or ripple over as the wind shakes them,

Turning a new face to the skeltering air,
Lovely in light or rain or shade,
In any weather inalterably fair.

Here the sky hangs so closely overhead,
From Dover's Hill to Blockley, a canopy spread
Roofing the valley with a changing light,
Where, underneath, long roads, winding and white,
Toil up the hill-sides to approach the sky,
Where the small town and all its villages lie,
Ruled and completed by the blue above.
And here the clouds that elsewhere distantly move,
Aloof, remote from human care or love,
Share in our daily life, no further away
Than the old elms or the warm ricks of hay,
And the sky is scarce stranger than the grass we tread,
And the rain falls softlier, kindlier here
Than in other places out of the austere

Hard heavens, wherefrom the traveller bends
his head.
Other skies are strange. We have been
where
Earth's friendliness grew thin in the cold air
And the small houses clung to the hill-side
And the restless wind in gaunt trees muttered
and cried
As it fled on. Not so this charmèd air
That softly steals by thicket and grove
With the low voice and the tender hands of love,
Or races laughing across the fields and throws
Stones and soft grass and flowers lightly
down
Where, like the bared heart of a dying rose,
In all its golden beauty glows the town.

And sometimes in the evening all's dove-pale,
When the day-weary breezes fail
And halt to make the valley a fold
For their far-driven flocks of cloud. We see
The cloudy edges of the lifted wold

Melt in the gray and fade in mystery.
Once rising early we beheld
Against dawn's pure and quiet western sky,
Poised in the airless branches of the tree,
A glowing apple night's thick dews had swelled
To sudden ripeness, the first, no neighbour by.
And once a burning haystack in the dusk
Lit up the valley, and all the people came
From the deeper night around, from the sombre husk
That burst to show this crimson fruit of flame;
And the tall fire rose into the sky and cast
Reflections and pale twilights far away,
And on the passing clouds a mimic day
That faded as they passed.

Draw back the curtain, throw the window wide!
Midnight. Round love's own dwelling, where we dwell,

Silently, softly those great presences glide,
Nothing their track to tell,
Save where the staring, pin-point stars go
out;
Still overhead they slide
In slow benignance folding us about.
Love, draw the curtain again and we will
sleep:
Let the friendly sky and the clouds our vigil
keep.

BOATS AT NIGHT

HOW lovely is the sound of oars at night
And unknown voices, borne through windless air,
From shadowy vessels floating out of sight
Beyond the harbour lantern's broken glare
To those piled rocks that make on the dark wave
Only a darker stain. The splashing oars
Slide softly on as in an echoing cave
And with the whisper of the unseen shores
Mingle their music, till the bell of night
Murmurs reverberations low and deep
That droop towards the land in swooning flight
Like whispers from the lazy lips of sleep.
The oars grow faint. Below the cloud-dim hill
The shadows fade and now the bay is still

THE HARBOUR

INTO your heart as into harbour home,
A flagging ship with furling sails, I come.
There round the haven stand immortal trees,
Rank upon rank, in sun-steeped terraces,
And in the water, still and blue and deep,
Their images and the ship's in quietness sleep;
And there the air is calm, is pure and bright,
Sweet to the nostrils, full of slumbering light,
So crystal-clear that all the shadows stand,
Sharp-edged, distinct, alike on sea and land.
There peacefully at anchor the ship lies,
Dreaming and still, where only change the skies
From noon's pale glow to night's profounder blue,
And radiance reigns the day and night-time through,
Whether the sun's light, or the moon's, or star's,
Falls on the deck and on the quiet spars.

No trouble comes those meeting capes between
Where rise the loaded vines in bounty green,
No angry water washes on the quays,
No querulous high moaning of the seas
Distracts the ear there, but a rich and still
Whisper drifts seaward from the tranquil hill,
Where in the long ravines of grassy land
The orchards heavy with their burden stand;
And in those sheltered folds the branches bear
Bright cherry, glowing apricot, gold pear,
Quinces and medlars and dark mulberries,
Year after year in generous increase;
And on the ground beneath, where apples fall,
The tangled vines of great-globed melons crawl.

Here is my rest and here at last I come
To lie upon your bosom and be dumb,
Where the clouds gather not, where no wind moves,
And the light that fills the quiet air is love's.

SONNET

THE dying man, whom all give up for dead,
Sees how his world a little circle grows,
The fire's warmth falling on the quiet bed,
The sunlight on the wall—sees not, but knows
How at his window the trees bud and leaf
And clouds march in procession through the sky,
Knows, but sees none of these, and his belief
Fails, and he chides his brain for fantasy.
But should he rise at length, should he awake
From that dark sleep and visit once again,
Feeble and slow as a new-sloughing snake,
What were before but hill and sky and plain,
He finds and hails, at each revealing turn,
Gold plains and skies like gems and hills that burn.

THE NIGHTJARS

ALL day the cuckoo has sung his double cries,
Far in the woods and hidden, or close but not seen:
Once he flew overhead and we heard the sound rise
In the song's space and die in a thicket green.

All day the blackbird has sung with the thrush
And the nightingale, though we heard him not clear,
And others chirped and murmured from bush to bush,
Loud, soft, shrill, uncertain, far and near.

Now on the dark hill, after that tumult of song,
Silence settles down, a step before night,
While on the ground and in the trees and all along

The widespread horizon slowly dies the light,

Like a rainbowed fish held dying in the net,
With last lovely flushes to the final gray;
And over the black hill a soft wind blows yet,
Carrying on wide wings the last light away.

How immense the silence! So a fountain falls,
When the jet fails, with a last scattered spray,
And the wind goes on, as the settling thrush calls,
Carrying on soft wings the last echoes away.

Step by step, slowly, we climb the silent hill,
Speechless, almost frightened. As the path wheels round
Into an open glade where the grass is hushed and still,
Warmth rises sudden and startling from the ground.

The trees merge and melt in the fading gray
sky,
And now from tree or bush, we cannot tell
where,
A thin sound arises, faintly, haltingly,
Stops to take breath and then fills the quiet
air

With a hoarse, sweet music. Thereon, all
around,
All the other nightjars join in the whirring
song,
And, as we pause to hear, the shadowy trees
resound
Till the whole vague hill-side is filled with
the throng,

Singing louder and louder. But all at once
The chorus gives way to the sweetest voice,
A single and lonely singer, whose unchanging
runs
Charm our ears with magic, monotonous
noise.

He pauses. We seek him; but the song once
gone,
There is nothing to show him. We clap
hands in vain.
Now over the crest a new faint song is begun,
That we can hardly hear. Is it he again ?

And as we halt, doubtful, in the darkness
growing
Thicker and stranger round us, full of
mysteries,
With the first night airs upon our faces blowing,
A dark shape flaps out from the invisible
trees,

And slides across our path, a moving clot of
night,
His wings knocking loudly as he flies along,
Startling the stillness. And he fades out of
our sight
And in his shadowy thicket resumes the song.

DOVER'S HILL

To F. L. Griggs.

FROM this hill where the air's so clear
We can see away and away,
And the villages, far as near,
Shine in the lucid day.
On rough short grass we tread
And thistles bend at our feet
And a lark sings overhead
And the clouds are white and fleet.
The wind is strong in our faces,
It drives us, we veer and yield,
And a broken thistle-top races
Over the tossing field;
But below, as we look around,
The deep long plains appear
Like a lost country drowned
In a tranquil flood of air,
Whence now and again there rises
To the listener on this shore
The muffled sound of the voices
Of bells that ring once more.

THE EMIGRATION

BEFORE dawn, under the windless mountains, the people
Came from their villages, assembling clan by clan,
Through the last hours of night over black dusty roads
Trailing reluctant feet, driving the slow waggons,
Men, women and children in the cold dusk confounded.
Hardly came a ray of light from the muffled sky,
Hardly in that still dawn a sound from quiet air,
Only the endless murmur of feet shuffling on,
The sobbing of tired children, and a woman's tears
Held in her bosom like a stream trickling in darkness,

And a young man's quickened breath that made no more
Than a puff of white on the chill air. Night was long,
That night in the valley, and all the winds were still.
Slow and unseen came the first ascent of the road
That led to the hidden pass and another world.
Here first the way grew stony, here first the feet
Of the weaker stumbled and were bruised, here the pebbles
Slipped under aching soles and wrenched the careless ankle;
And now from summits yet in darkness unknown,
From snowy slopes and dizzy ice-belted peaks,
Stole, with the louder sounding of the waterfall,
A still wind hardly moving whose gentle breath

Crept through woollen cloaks like the trickling
of water.

The king, their leader, daunted his stout
stallion
And drew into a rocky cleft whence he watched
The sad procession winding upward in silence,
Marked every drooping shoulder that bore
a spear
And every woman that held in cramped arms
A child to her breast and every walking child
That whimpered and stumbled. He saw them
all
Though gray through the gray night they
drooped and stumbled.
When the last had gone he turned and rode
downwards,
Carefully, leaning back on his horse's haunches,
And before him unseen, like messengers in
haste,
Plunged the rattling stones dislodged by the
hooves.

On the flat land he first saw the growing light
That hovered on the swift stream rustling beside him,
Ice-cold, ice-gray, endlessly tossed and heaved
In small blunt waves, as down from the glacier,
Hung aloft still in night, it fled to the valley,
There to grow calm, to grow smooth and peaceable,
Spreading in reedy brooks through the water-meadows
Where the tadpoles thicken the stream and the dragon-flies
Mate in late spring on their dizzy flights.
Here the king paused as the twilight brightened.
Light swelledas into an aching head comes sleep,
Thus unknown, unperceived, but steadily growing
Till the near fields were distinct and the nearest farm
Plainly to be seen, with byre, barn and sheds,
And there on the dung-heap a lazy cock
Moving sluggish wings and lifting his head.

And the light grew. And, beyond, the land
was revealed,
Pastures and grain and the scattered houses
Over which the elms spread out their broad
branches;
And further beyond rose the desolate hills
Covered with stubborn bushes, bracken and
wiry grass,
And the poisonous green marshes that lay in
their hollows,
Bounding the narrow valley with an iron wall.

So, since the valley was narrow and close-
bounded,
A circle of fruitfulness hemmed in by the
unfruitful,
Since the quiet race brought forth ever more
children,
Sons must leave their fathers, daughters their
mothers,
The quiet be the unquiet and stay-at-homes
be wanderers.

No words came to the king's lips. He gazed
around him,
Dumbly regarding the land where his brother
to-day
Ruled in his place. Far away his eyes travelled
Seeing the first smoke rising from a farm-
house
Twenty feet untroubled in the motionless air.
They are rising, he whispered, the wife has
lighted
Their fire and the husband pauses in the door
To look at his cattle grazing in the meadows.
So have we all; and when we are gone
Still every morning the fires will be lighted,
Men will go to the fields and bring in the
crops.
In the cool dark barn where my oats were
gathered,
Where I rested on the heap and took soft
handfuls
Of the smooth hard grain that ran through
my fingers,

This year my brother will gather his oats
And coming in tired from walking his fields,
Dazed with summer's glare, will throw himself down
On the yielding heap and hear the whispering
Of the flowing grain that trickles round his body
—Next year as well, and many, many years.

The light grew strong: it was now full morning.
He turned his horse and rode like a storm
After the marching people. Up the steep track
The horse's strong shoulders forced the ground behind him,
Plunging and pulling. The blue sky above
Grew brighter and colder: with a rush of cold waters
The torrent hurled downwards in its narrow channel.
On the high shoulder of the wind-swept mountain

The track turned round and beyond the corner
The king in his haste found the people halted,
Below them the abyss—and the shelving path
Stretched narrow and treacherous into the distance.
Strung out along it, huddled and comfortless,
They made their poor breakfast. Their sullen eyes
Looked only at the hard stone beneath their feet,
Not backwards or forwards. But a group of women
Clustered at the edge with gestures and sad cries,
And in the midst of them a silent woman
Stared into the gulf. For she was the mother
Of the first that died, of the child whose foot
Had turned on a pebble, throwing him over,

Down, down, down, bouncing from ledge to ledge.
There now his body, spread-eagled on the rubble,
Alone, abandoned, waited vultures and wolves.
The king rode past, saying nothing. His grim lips
Were frozen hard by pain and love of his people.
His hard bleak eyes stared onward where the ribbon-path
Vanished in the waste of the tumbled snowy mountains,
Peak after peak and chasm after chasm,
Mercilessly lighted by the cold lucid sun.

STANZAS WRITTEN IN DEJECTION

HOW then, my dark and empty spirit,
Wouldst thou employ these brooding days?
The senses lose their trivial merit,
The sky grows chill, the rose decays;
We see no more what we have seen,
We are not now what we have been.

Thus in the middle of her season
Sometimes the flowering may doth fade.
Who knoweth by what inner treason
Her rich adornment is betrayed ?
Now as the blossom from the tree
So falls my old content from me.

I cannot tell what saps me so
And takes enjoyment from my mind:
I only see the bright months grow
Duller or my weak eyes more blind.
This year hath ousted from my breast
Joy for a dark and vague unrest.

I read in some forgotten story
How in the mountains of the west,
Where the calm sea in sun-flecked glory
Under the snow-peaks lies at rest,
The dying eagle seeks a place
Where a great wind drives up in space;

And there though from his failing wings
Motion has gone with joy and strength,
On the ascending stream he swings
Into the sky and sees at length
On the warm current soaring high
The ledge where first he learnt to fly,

The valleys where of old he preyed,
The eyries where he dwelt and loved,
That eyrie where his nest was made,
Which long the tempest hath removed—
In his ascent he sees these things
And needs no motion of his wings.

And still up-borne he rises higher
And fades from his companions' sight,

Lost in the sun's descending fire,
  Floating amid a sea of light—
Would that we too, when pleasures fail,
Could find at last that mighty gale!

Would that we too, no effort making,
  On such a current could aspire,
Through the thick air and cloud-wreaths
    breaking
  Into the heights that we desire,
There in a lonely still delight
To float upon a sea of light!

THE SHADOW

DEATH, would I feared not thee,
But ever can I see
Thy mutable shadow thrown
Upon the walls of Life's warm, cheerful room.
Companioned or alone,
I feel the presence of that following gloom,
Like one who vaguely knows
Behind his back the shade his body throws—
'Tis not thy shadow only, 'tis my own!

I face towards the light
That rises fair and bright
Over wide fields asleep,
But still I know that stealthy darkness there
Close at my heels doth creep,
My ghostly company, my haunting care;
And if the light be strong
Before my eyes, through pleasant hours and long,
Then, then, the shadow is most black and deep.

A HOLLOW ELM

WHAT hast thou not withstood,
Tempest-despising tree,
Whose bloat and riven wood
Gapes now so hollowly,
What rains have beaten thee through many years,
What snows from off thy boughs have dripped like tears ?

Calmly thou standest now
Upon thy sunny mound;
The first spring breezes flow
Past with sweet dizzy sound;
Yet on thy pollard top the branches few
Stand stiffly out, disdain to murmur too.

The children at thy foot
Open new-lighted eyes
Where on gnarled bark and root
The soft warm sunshine lies—

Dost thou upon thine ancient sides resent
The touch of youth, quick and impermanent ?

These at the beck of spring
Live in the moment still;
Thy boughs unquivering,
Remembering winter's chill
And many other winters past and gone,
Are mocked, not cheated, by the transient sun.

Hast thou so much withstood,
Dumb and unmoving tree,
That now thy hollow wood
Stiffens disdainfully
Against the soft spring airs and soft spring rain,
Knowing too well that winter comes again ?

CONSTANTINOPLE

I suddenly realise that the ambition of my life has been—since I was two—to go on a military expedition against Constantinople. . . . This is nonsense.—*Letters of Rupert Brooke.*

Still it waits redeeming.—*James Elroy Flecker.*

FIRST VOICE

NO more, they say, the Host is raised in
that Cathedral which was mine.

SECOND VOICE

Like you I too beneath that dome have eat
the bread and drunk the wine
That's banished thence, but not like yours
my empire shook at last and fell
And then I died upon the walls built by
another Constantine.

FIRST VOICE

All's changed, they say, all's changed within
that lovely and most sacred shell,

And where dark unbelievers pray no more
the holy eikons shine.

SECOND VOICE

I do not know. I do not know. When I
went out to fight that day
My starving people filled the streets and
cheered me thinly on my way.
Behind me lay the Christian town, before me
stood the infidel;
And they were many, we were few—I know
no more but that I fell.
I could not see or hear or ask, my face being
masked with blood and clay.

FIRST VOICE

Byzantium was proud and strong. When war
and fire had struck and ceased,
To build her lovelier than before I took the
treasures of the east.
A thousand cunning artists worked on floor
and pillar, porch and dome,

In marble and in precious stones to make the
Holy Wisdom's home;
And there when all the toil was done I knelt
and prayed, I bowed my head,
Knowing that now Byzantium was royal as
the elder Rome.

SECOND VOICE

And is the Holy Wisdom fled since that fierce
creed rolled o'er my head ?

FIRST VOICE

The heathen prays where once we prayed,
now that both you and I are dead.
Poor fallen king, nine hundred years from
me to you the city stood
And seven centuries her walls were washed
in vain with Moslem blood,
An angry tide that rose to flood and boiled
and stormed and ebbed again,
Where like a torrent in the sea the blood of
our own Greeks was shed.

SECOND VOICE

So deep I fell in my defeat, the centuries that wax and wane
Have passed like shadows on the grave wherein I lie and do not know
How many years are gone since then, how fares it with your sacred fane.

FIRST VOICE

I am a shade no less than you—thin rumours reach us here below.
How should I tell what falls on earth and how the tides of battle flow?
Yet it is said the Christians go against the heathen in our seat
Though four long sullen centuries have left unanswered your defeat.

SECOND VOICE

There were young men who fought with me, who stood with me upon the walls –
Would in this waste of empty time that somewhere they and I could meet!

They were my brothers and my friends who
fought to keep the city free,
And I would take their hands again . . .
something within me stirs and calls . . .
O God, Whose house I fought to save, send
back my ancient friends to me,
They who were bound by the same bond and
died in armour as I died!

FIRST VOICE

Who is it comes?

SECOND VOICE

In this lone place what younger shadow wavers
near?
None of my friends could find me here, the
wastes of hell are dark and wide,
And yet . . . and yet . . .

FIRST VOICE

Who are you? Speak! We are two shades
and nought to fear.

THIRD VOICE

I died a soldier.

SECOND VOICE

I as well. Come, brother, closer to my side.
How come you, from what battlefield, what
banners had your enemy ?

THIRD VOICE

I was a poet, I was young, a northern island
gave me birth,
I knew and loved my fellow-men, I knew and
loved the lovely earth,
Yet in my youth I married death and gave my
life without a sigh,
Gave all the love I bore and had, came to the
eastern sea to die.
My foes were yours.

SECOND VOICE

The tale is true! Still they oppose the infidel!

FIRST VOICE

God's mercy hath designed an end—speak on, young soldier, you speak well.
Tell us how Christian arms again were carried up the Golden Horn
And how again the Christian cross was planted on our citadel.

THIRD VOICE

I died before, I lay alone, my comrades stormed the beach and hill,
But where the earth was red and torn, my wistful spirit followed still.

FIRST VOICE

I heard the thunder of that war, an unknown thunder strange to hear,
Beat like a wave on Islam's shore, like doom within the Sultan's ear.

SECOND VOICE

O brother, speak! You died before, but still you saw the army go

Between the city's holy walls and drive the heathen from our throne.
Brother, upon those walls I fell, I fell four hundred years ago,
Tell me——

THIRD VOICE

Within my valley-grave I felt a peace till then unknown,
Happy I had not died in vain nor those who died away from me . . .

FIRST VOICE

He pauses and his voice is lost, the fire of speech is drowned with tears.

SECOND VOICE

O new companion, speak again, we have waited here so many years!

THIRD VOICE

In life I had loved earth so well, the ties of earth and flesh were strong,

And after I was laid in earth Scyros the
island held me long,
Till on a day the rumour came that sent me
here below to you,
Sickened of earth by grief and shame to know
my childish dream untrue.

FIRST VOICE

What is the news you strive to tell? Has the
first Mass not yet been said
Beneath the dome where once I knelt and
bowed a proud imperial head?

THIRD VOICE

No Christian stands beneath that dome to eat
the bread or drink the wine,
No Mass has there been said or sung, but
praises in a heathen tongue
To those who gave the Turk again the sacred
walls of Constantine.

SECOND VOICE

We died in vain, my friends and I.

THIRD VOICE

My friends and I have died in vain.

FIRST VOICE

Nought given in the city's cause is wholly lost. The walls remain.
O raise your heads, my friends, and know that while the soaring dome shall stand.
Though heathens hold it for a space the city still is Christian land,
And though the years we wait be long and black the deed and deep the shame,
Yet still shall hope burn like a flame while Christian hearts and swords are strong.
O youngest friend, have peace awhile: though you should wait as long as we,
The life you gave was not in vain and you shall see the city free.

Note.—This poem was written in February, 1920, on reading the announcement that Constantinople was to be handed back to the

Turk. The three speakers are Justinian, Constantine Palæologus and Rupert Brooke. The verbal reminiscences of Flecker are, of course, deliberate.

CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY

HOW wonderful the world, how wonderful the race
That binds with rails her savage earth, that rides her skies,
That in the sun's inflamed or the moon's tranquil face
Wets her wild soil with tears and lives and loves and dies!

Men have not ceased from toil since first they went upright,
Their ships traverse the seas, their bridges span the streams,
They harness fire and water and create power and light,
They have overcome the earth in the intervals of dreams.

Long has their struggle been, diverse the deeds they do,

Harsh is their enemy, bitter the wounds
they bear;
How many of their sons the merciless water
slew,
How many died by fire or tumbled from
the air?

Still inch by painful inch the reluctant world
is won,
The mountain's entrails pierced, the highest
summit trod,
And against deadly rain and the uncertain sun
Each year the crops are wrenched from
the unwilling sod,

And houses piled on high that from earth's
flesh are made,
Beasts bound and tamed and taught to be
the slaves of man;
And men arise and burn with lofty hope and
fade,
Leaving their sons advanced towards
heaven a little span.

Yea, were not this enough, to have struggled
with the earth,
To have seen their fellows die by famine,
fire, and plague,
To have seen their women anguish in the pangs
of birth,
To have known all these brave souls lost
in the lightless vague ?

But man aspires past death, hungers beyond
the flesh,
Dreams of he knows not what, a vast and
shadowy thing,
Forgets his fight with earth and strives to
break the mesh
Even of his own desires, and spread a huger
wing,

Forgets his fight with earth, turns from the
sullen foe,
Leaves the far seas uncrossed, the forest
still unpathed,

Lays by his spade and gazes where the high clouds go
Or idly broods above the sea by moonlight bathed.

And strange new longings rise and vaguer mightier dreams
Well in his boundless heart as now through timeless hours
He hears the murmur of the bridged or unbridged streams
And sees the fields alight with a million burning flowers.

Yea, were not this enough? O banded heavens, say,
To have added pain to pain, to have added dreams to toil,
To have slaved in dreams by night as with his hands by day,
To have wakened in his breast the soul's dark serpent-coil?

But dream breeds dream apace and covers all
the world
With a fair image prophesying things to
be,
And while through heaving time his fragile
life is hurled
Audacious man hath paused and dreamt
he may be free,

And pondering greatly thus, leapt on his
fellow-man;
And wars have scored the earth and the sea
drunk her fill,
And marching, ruining armies laid their
dusty ban
On harbour, field, and barn, and lofty-
palaced hill.

If earth had had a heart, surely that heart were
glad
To see her pygmy foes squander their blood
in vain,

To see her hills again in her own loose weeds
clad,
To see the dams and dykes yield to her
high-piled rain.

And still the contest grew, still the dream
huger swelled
And with its wings obscured the opening
vast abyss,
Till at the last mankind, in noblest fury held,
Swayed like two wrestlers locked close to
a precipice!

October, 1918.

THE END

I DREAMT that I was standing in a wood
Where the trees parted and a ride came through,
Not used by many, for the undergrowth,
Saplings five inches high and nettles, spread
Across the ruts even to the middle. And
On either side the tall trees rose and brambles
Looped round the heavy boles their thorny ropes.
Down the long track came slowly a weary rider.
His horse's hooves made no sound in the wood,
They moved so slowly. The horse was bony and old,
With ragged mane and tail and gnarled thin legs
And head that drooped from the loose-hanging reins.
The rider was old and thin, his clothes were shabby,

His saddle scratched and worn, his stirrups dull
And pitted with rust. He held between his hands
Upon the saddle-bow a cup wrapped loosely
In old discoloured rags. I could not see
What shape it was, or whether of metal or glass,
But as I looked I saw the rider's eyes
Bent burning on it. Never on the road
He turned his gaze but still upon the cup
He stared and still the horse walked slowly on,
Reins hanging on its scraggy neck. I saw
Those eyes, so fiercely still, burn on the cup
And round them all the lines of the thin face
Grooved by despair and shame that made a victory
Seem like defeat—as joyless. Then behind
The rider came a crowd of men and women
Who walked the track as soundlessly as he.
Behind the brambles dizzily I stared
And half saw some and others not at all,

But all I saw were such as every day
Walk about city streets. There were rich men
Glossily dressed, and women in stale rags,
Children with smeary faces, dowdy women,
Fussily proper, clerks, workmen, and tramps,
And young girls proud still of their pretty bodies
And young men thinking of their games and schoolboys
Carrying books. Thus through the wood they went,
Following the rider, and their trampling boots
Fell soundless on the thick-grown track, their breathing
Never disturbed the dust that in the air
Rose from the full-blown meadowsweet. They marched
On and on unending, rank after rank,
And still the long grass waved about their feet
Unbroken. In their various faces I

Could read nothing. Willing, uneager eyes
Followed the rider, fading now from sight.
After them in like procession came
A cavalcade of beasts, the homely animals
That live about our houses, dogs and cats
And horses, and the small beasts of the fields,
And mixed with them strange unknown tropical things,
Flaming tigers and quaint-shaped burrowing brutes,
Hopping, leaping, and crawling, and snakes and birds
That hovered in flocks above the track and alighted
And flew again, cuckoo and eagle and dove
Mixing together. I gazed between the leaves
And still a mist hung heavy on my eyes
Blurring these shapes. And when they all were gone
Time paused an instant. Then the trees seemed
To drag their long roots slowly from the ground

And follow after, and the bushes too,
And like a swarm of bees the smaller plants,
Slender-stalked and starry-leafed, arose
And from my face the screen of bramble boughs
Suddenly fell; and all in that strange train
Swept onward and the earth was black and bare
And I was left alone, unsheltered, unshaded.
I looked around and there was nothing left,
No living thing, man, animal or plant
But bleak dead earth where no wind moved, rain fell,
Fire burnt. And still I stood. Then there came slowly
On the same way a figure mountain-high
Whose bright horns in the clouds, had there been clouds,
Would have projected. In his hands before him
He held a book, open, which he studied closely,

Walking on soundless feet, with downcast
eyes.
And as he reached the spot where not my body
But now my fleshless spirit stood in terror
He paused and raised his head. The thunder-
cloud eyes
Stared up into the blank and colourless
heaven
Then down again upon the fatal page.
He closed the volume up. Then there was
nothing.

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